

Workers under siege on the mines

STATEMENTS about good working conditions by Anglo American bosses are nothing but a public relations exercise meant to fool the unsuspecting public, say the mineworkers interviewed in a NUM survey.

Since the NUM started to organise miners, significant gains were made in terms of wages and general living conditions. Anglo bosses never objected to NUM's right to organise at its mines. Thousands of mineworkers joined the union and started challenging low wages and working conditions as a 'united workforce'.

Union under attack

After the 1987 strike the attitude of the bosses changed towards union members, shaft stewards and NUM officials. The bosses use different methods to weaken the miners' power to negotiate. The bosses have taken up a campaign of rooting out the union.

The bosses are withdrawing recognition agreements signed with NUM. This makes it impossible for miners' representatives to take up issues with management.

With recognition agreements taken away it is becoming more difficult for mineworkers to go on a legal strike like that of 1987. Without strike action the struggle of workers for a living wage and better working conditions is very difficult. There is nothing they can do but complain to the bosses.

Shaft stewards as true worker representatives have their power taken away by recognition agreements withdrawals. Then shaft stewards suffer harassment ranging from demands for petty offences to physical assaults.

Shaft stewards harassed

As one shaft steward said: 'Shaft stewards were told that the union at number two shaft has been destroyed and that control has been taken over by mine security.' He said 'I mean that we do not talk about any matter of the union in the compound.'

'We avoid each other at all costs, we do not even talk to each other, because we think we would be accused of engineering strikes.' The bosses have appointed indunas and mine security to carry out the plan of crushing the NUM.

'After coming back from the strike, I have a peculiar problem. Whenever I'm seen with a group of workers, I will be accused by the indunas of trying to revive the union. They are sent by the hostel management and I'm warned to

stop what I'm doing', another shaft steward added.

Workers' grievance hearings and disciplinary charges are conducted with management without shaft stewards. When shaft stewards are present they take part as observers or miners' friends as demanded by mine bosses.

As one shaft steward said: 'Shaft stewards have been given a severe name - jan-akobem, not to participate at all.'

Anglo American's Coal Division Disciplinary Code is clear on this anti-union practice. 'The role of the friend is to advise the alleged offender on the presentation of his case, act as an observer and, at the direction of the hearing chairman, may comment on the facts of the case or speak in mitigation.'

Facilities taken away

For the proper and efficient running of the union, facilities such as offices, halls and telephones are very important.

The mines and their towns are generally owned by mining houses. So the closing of union offices and refusal to offer NUM officials telephones by Anglo American mine bosses is a serious blow to the right of workers to organise themselves into trade unions of their choice.

Songs and meetings banned

It is more and more difficult for the unions to hold meetings with workers as such meetings are banned. If the meetings are not banned the whole machinery of obstruction is set rolling against the workers.

Workers are forced to give agendas and names of speakers to the bosses. Often outside speakers including union officials are not allowed to talk.

With singing of union songs strictly forbidden workers remain quiet while mine security tape-record or video meetings.

Singing of freedom songs is banned under the pretext that workers insult Gatscha Bulhelezi and P.W. Botha.

In some cases union meetings are cut short before finished. Speakers face general harassment as they are questioned by management about what they said at meetings.

After the 1987 strike such practices are widespread as shown by reports like these.

'We have to apply for permission seven days before the day of the meeting. Before the strike we were never required to give notice.'

'Sometimes management cuts off the agenda, for example, the new pension scheme, the new labour act and wage increases.'

'One shaft steward was punished for having said something that was not on the agenda.'



ABOVE: Overcrowded hostels are very usual. Conditions are unhealthy and workers have no privacy. LEFT: A message on the T-shirt is to Anglo and is clear - stop union-bashing! RIGHT: If meetings are allowed to take place they are strictly controlled. Singing is not permitted at many mines



located a flight in Europe for 'ambling'. Communist block - overseas agency master-minded the NUM strike. Top officials are spending and gambling away thousands of rands paid into union funds, such are the anti-union lies fed to the mineworkers.

Radio and TV

The mine bosses, not satisfied with the lies spread to mineworkers through state controlled SABC-TV, use their own public address system to influence the minds of mineworkers with anti-NUM news.

'The public address system was used. We were ordered not to talk about the union anymore,' said a shaft steward.

In an imitation of the bosses' friends in the SABC-TV, underground radio stations appear to be a new source of confusion as 'Radio Reef' was installed in one mine. 'Radio Reef' situated underground is booming at shaft stations for mineworkers who wait for cages.

Some typical examples are: 'Motlatai and Ramaphosa

THE PEOPLE of South Africa have been living under the State of Emergency for more than two years.

With black mineworkers a State of Emergency' has been with us long before P.W. Botha declared it nationally.

The compounds like mines are owned by mine bosses who have full control of the lives of mineworkers as the suppliers of food and shelter.

Before the 1987 miners strike, the tight control put on mineworkers lives through the compound system was relaxed due to campaigns waged by NUM.

After the strike this mine boss

'State of emergency' has been tightened. Workers are being forced back to the compounds days before the union was started.

Fenced compounds

The hostel compounds, housing up to 13 000 males, are fenced with 3 metres walls topped with barbed wire. The outside mine premises are security fenced with main entrance gates manned by mine security - the private army of mine bosses deployed on South African mines.

On entering mine premises mineworkers and non-mineworkers are subjected to security checks.

Mine compounds have their



own gates manned by mine security who do a rocheck sometimes with workers having to show armed bands attached to the arms with identification numbers like prisoners.

It is difficult for outsiders like union officials to enter mine premises and compounds as a result of tight security.

Freedom of movement and association is decided by mine bosses who say where workers should stay and go. Tribal housing is practised, combined with job differentiation. Groups taken to be 'tame' are housed near administration offices to make management's access to them easier in time of crisis to misinform them and cause divisions.

With small rooms with welded windows, housing up to 22 mineworkers, the conditions are horrible and unhealthy.

The bosses' 'check absorbers' - personnel assistants, clerks, gang supervisors, team leaders and UJWSA members - are housed separately and this makes it impossible for NUM to talk to them.

Bosses' private army

Mine owners have a complicated security network covering all South African mines. The real task is to gather information on mineworkers' activities so as to hinder their organisation.

The information gathering in miners' extends to the use of physical force to suppress any dissent from mineworkers. The true nature of this private army became clear during the historic 1987 strike where miners suffered heavily at the hands of this army.

Assaults

Incidents of brutal assaults, teargassing, baton charging and shootings were widely alleged as the 21 day strike continued.

At the lower level mineworkers are harassed by

team leaders who get instructions from shift bosses. Disciplinary charges are pressed against workers and may lead to dismissal.

On the other end mine captains and personnel assistants closely watch the activities of miners. There is intimidation through complaint forms, parades, and interrogations on union activities and anti-union indoctrination lectures.

This scheme enters the miners' rooms through isobandas (room prefects), indunas (hostel prefects) and compound police. Workers are denied any privacy.

The core of the bosses' army is mine security which is allowed to equip itself with weapons.

With mine security clad in green fatigues patrolling mine compounds on horse back, the miners feel surrounded.

Dog squads

Vicious dog squads keep close watch on any anti-boss activity. Miners are always aware of the possible results if they challenge management.

Like in the black townships and villages where SADF armoured vehicles are permanently stationed, mineworkers are forced to surrender to the bosses' control through caissons and hippos with target chimneys on top.

In times of crisis all these forces are set in motion against mineworkers. White miners are used as reserves. The police have been called in the past.

The open unholy alliance of the State and mine bosses supported by white miners against black miners' genuine grievances and legitimate demands makes conditions extremely difficult for NUM to conduct its normal activities to improve the general working conditions of the toiling miners.

The apartheid state, mine bosses and industry in general are clubbed together through the so called Defence Manpower Liaison Committees (DEMLACOMS).

It is not surprising that the Administrative Manager of the Johannesburg Chamber of Mines, Col. Chris Du Toit is the chairman of the Johannesburg DELMACOM.

His approval of the committees as platforms for exchange of ideas between SADF, commerce, industry and local authorities is typical of the whole class of big businessmen who rule our lives as workers.

Through the DELMACOMS the unpopular Joint Management Centres (JMCs), structures set by state throughout the country to counter anti-apartheid activities, are given information about workers activities.

"Spies" of the Chamber

THE CHAMBER of Mines secretly watches the NUM and union members. Secret Chamber notes on union activity are then sent to the bosses.

'These are some examples of the "spies" reports from last year.'

'On 13th December (three NUM officials) visited NUM head office and returned with pamphlets concerning December 16th to 26th and the UDF Update.'

'In the Rustenberg area, there has been a massive upsurge in NUM meetings which have generally had up to 600 attending.'

'The NUM Central Executive Committee meeting was held at the Jomo Centre on the 10th October and the NEC held a meeting in Cartanville over the weekend of 24th October.'

The Chamber 'spies' are asked to report on the details of union activity: meetings, membership and movement of officials.

In each region the headquarters of the Chamber of Mines information network are in the TERA office. TERA agents send in monthly reports. These are concerned not only with NUM activity, but also with COSATU and community organisations.